

The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

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Remarks by President Obama After Roundtable at Parliamentary Resource Center | November 13, 2014

Parliamentary Resource Center
Naypyidaw, Burma

4:49 P.M. MMT

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Well, I just had an excellent roundtable discussion with members of parliament as well as the speaker of the lower and upper chamber -- I may not be describing the term properly -- as well as Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who I will have an opportunity to visit later tomorrow.

It was an excellent discussion about this transition process that's taking place here in Myanmar around consolidating some of the gains that have already been made, but also pushing further to institute a genuine democracy here in this country that can serve the needs of all people. I've been very impressed by not only the quality of the members of parliament, but also their determination to move forward. And they represent different parties, but they're unified in wanting to see a better life for the people of this country.

And I want to thank the National Democratic Institute, NDI, as well as the work that we're doing through USAID to try to provide some of the technical skills and resources necessary for what is a new experience for many people -- and that is running a democratic process and having a parliament. And I'm very proud of the work that the United States is doing in partnering with this country in advancing some of these goals.

There were a lot of discussions that I think will be familiar with every country -- how we make sure that we're protecting minority rights; what's the balance between decentralization and centralization; how do majority parties and opposition parties work together for the good of the country, but how do you prevent the kind of acrimony or institutional entrenchment that over time erodes democracy. There are certain unique circumstances involved in this transition. The large number of ethnic groups in the country, the existing armed conflicts that have gone on for many years between some of the ethnic groups and the government, and the fact that the military is still a very powerful institution, and managing how it transitions to greater civilian participation. And these are all questions that you've seen both in the region and around the world. And in the United States, we've had to wrestle with many of these questions as well, both in our founding and over the course of our democracy.

But what I'm encouraged by is the commitment of all the individuals here to try to make this work. And I think that if with strong leadership and commitment the attitude that I've heard today continues in the years to come, then I'm confident that (inaudible) a completely new day for Myanmar. But the work is not yet done, and the goal of the United States here is to be a strong partner in the process. Like every good friend, we will praise what works. There will be times where we offer constructive criticism about a lack of progress in certain areas or where reform efforts have stalled.

But our consistent aim and goal will be to see that this transition is completed so that it delivers concrete benefits for the people, whether that's improved incomes for ordinary people; whether it means that farmers have greater access to productive lands; or it means young people are getting a high-quality education; or it means that religious minorities are adequately protected. The test in the end will be is it making people's lives better. These aren't abstract conversations, and I think all members of parliament here recognize that.

So I very much appreciate all the support (inaudible) with me, and it will inform my conversations with President Thein Sein this evening as well as my meetings with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi tomorrow when I travel down to Yangon.

Thank you very much, everybody. (Applause.)

END

4:55 P.M. MMT